

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

Chair: *Peter Burling*
Vice Chair: *Katherine Hersh*

Minutes

October 29, 2010

10:00 am

LOB 201

Present: Chair Peter Burling, Vice-Chair Kathy Hersh, Rep. Bouchard, Kerrie Diers, David Preece, Ray Gagnon, Mike Izbicki, Nancy Larson, Rep. Keans, Tom Mahon, Jay Minkarah, Kit Morgan, Tim Moore, Ted Starkweather, Mike Tardiff, Malcolm Taylor. Guest present: Michael Pillsbury.

- I. **Call to Order:** Chair Burling called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Asked Michael Pillsbury to provide information regarding the good news we received this week. Mike Pillsbury stated that the State has received official word that we will receive \$2.24 million in Federal Rail Administration planning grant funds to complete a service development plan and NEPA documentation from Boston to Concord. The \$1.9 million Federal Transit Administration grant funds will now be used to combine with the FRA funds for the study on the same corridor. DOT has received word from FRA saying that they are ready and willing to work with us to pull both planning grants together. This is the first time in history that these two Federal Agencies will work together on a planning grant. FTA funds will look at the commuter rail portion and the FRA funds will look at the intercity. There are differences in where dollars can be spent, so we will be working closely with them on the scope of services. FTA will look at alternatives analysis, service development plan and environmental. The result of the plan will set the stage for final design and engineering. We will need to make application to FTA to receive and expend funds. Kudos to everyone here – perseverance paid off.

Peter Burling asked if the DOT would like a Representative from the NHRTA to join in on those meetings. Mike Pillsbury said this would be very helpful. He suggested we work with Mike Izbicki to be the point of contact and he can bring others in as needed.

The time frames going forward will be about 18 – 21 months. The work of consultant will be 18 months, but the FTA/FRA coordination might put things behind a few months. Within the next several months, letters will be sent out to consultants. It's going to get very technical very quickly. Mike Pillsbury thought that they might need to bring on a private administrator to manage the project on technical advice.

Kathy Hersh expressed her concerns about the schedule. We need to be positioned to access construction funds and need to know when we might start looking at that. Can we get a draft schedule so we know what to expect and keep track?

Michael Tardiff noted that the statement from FRA said that the project was "fully funded" in the announcement – does that include the match and that is taken care

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

of? Mike Pillsbury stated that the \$2.24 million is the amount that we asked for, not including the match. The coordination of the 2 federal agencies is the uncertainty in the beginning of the schedule.

Peter Burling stated that our job is to explain to people of NH what is going on and offer our assistance where we can. He thanked DOT, especially Kit Morgan and Mike Pillsbury for all of their tremendous efforts in getting this grant awarded. They were applauded by the committee.

- II. **Public Input:** Barbara McElroy from Hanover delivered a letter of support and congratulations from the State League of Women Voters and added thanks to NH DOT. She also wanted to offer comments on the draft long range transportation plan. She noted that this new draft is especially weak on rail. The Long Range Plan should enthusiastically embrace the goals of the climate action plan and should state the goals are to reduce vehicle miles traveled for all, including truck traffic. The plan seems to be weaker than the 2008 version and now seems to focus on buses.

Mike Pillsbury thanked Ms. McElroy for her comment. He will look at the 2008 plan recommendations and compare to current draft. Will look into it more and will respond.

Peter Burling thanked Ms. McElroy for the committed and active interest of the League of Women Voters. This is significant and we appreciate the support.

Mike Smith, owner of Fingerlakes Railway in upstate NY, stated that NH DOT should be commended for getting this grant. He provided suggestions for things to avoid in administering the grant: talk to people in the business and the host railroad before you get started. Look at Vermont as a model of way of doing business: freight component was integral to building support base for project. White River to Brattleboro will be 75 mi/hour. This was done successfully. We don't want to overreach and look to things that work. He hopes that the study will include White River Junction and Concord north. In terms of south of Concord, you need to ensure a viable freight business to be successful. This is an immense project being proposed, \$300 million is a difficult number to obtain. He suggests coming up with a plan that breaks it down into practical feasible tasks. High speed rail to Montreal is a great goal. Need to continually be vigilant in pursuing the construction grant.

Peter Burling stated that we need to continue to focus on the regional efforts and integrating NH into the wider regional effort.

- III. **Minutes:**

David Preece made a motion to approve the minutes of October 1, 2010, seconded by Ted Starkweather. The minutes were approved unanimously.

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

IV. Capitol Corridor Updates

- a. **Status of grant application** – Mike Pillsbury’s presentation earlier gave us a succinct overview. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, not much is accomplished. We should approach winners after the election and talk to them about why we think this project is so important. Peter Burling will work with Mike Izbicki and Kathy Hersh to ask members to join them with presentations and meetings.
- b. **Next Steps to secure FTA funds** – Also see earlier comments. A tentative schedule would be great to have.
- c. **Amtrak Update** – There was news this morning that Amtrak received a \$4.4 million contract for 440 electric locomotives by Siemens, which would result in 250 construction jobs and 100 other jobs created in the Sacramento area, built in the US.

Kathy Hersh said that will we need to have our operating agreements in place to apply for future design and construction grants. As we move forward, we should plug this into the overall schedule.

Plaistow Project –Tim Moore reports that CMAQ funds are still in play. They did not receive the TIGERII grant. Kit Morgan stated that they continue to work on potential terms of an agreement with MBTA to show that we are making progress in terms of how this would operate regardless of funding issues. Peter Burling stated that in terms of ownership of service, we are assuming this is in DOT’s jurisdiction. Do we need to clarify anything with legislature?

V. Other Discussion

- a. **Rail Plan** – Kit Morgan hopes to have a contract signed by Governor and Council in December with HDR Engineering. He anticipates that this will be a 12 month project.
- b. **Enfield Rail Project** – Still on hold.
- c. **Other** - Rail connection to Manchester-Boston Regional Airport is critical. With extension to Green International airport at RI, competitive advantage has shifted. Need to be able to say we have immediate access to rail to be competitive.
 - i. January is our annual meeting, and we should put together an annual report. Should have a draft to review in December. Peter Burling, David and Kerrie will work on the annual report.
 - ii. Malcolm Taylor is looking for update on Northern Rail Project – Tuck students can help with this. This would be for the spring term, and there should be discussions beginning now. Peter Burling stated that freight rail is not included in our legislative authorization. This is exclusive DOT issue, but is incredibly important to our work.

New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority

- iii. David Preece mentioned the NE Rail Summit on Oct 15. NHDOT was well represented as well as Southern NH PC. The summit was another wake up call. Rail is happening all around in neighboring states and if we had not received this funding, we would have been done. More than transportation, this is our whole economic future. Mike Izbicki suggested we look at the NE Rail map. There are construction dollars for the Knowledge Corridor and they are moving forward with plans to go to Montreal. The old Boston & Maine line is a huge leap for White River Junction. The Downeaster planning grant extends up to Montreal, bypassing NH. The urgency is now for NH. They are going right around us. If we can't develop our freight and passenger rail system, we will be left behind the economic engine. What is the movement for regional cooperation still going forward?
 - iv. Mike Izbicki, Kit Morgan and Mike Pillsbury should be congratulated for all of their hard work on getting the application awarded.
 - v. Tim Moore suggested that we need to sit down with legislature and have a discussion about how we are going to finance rail operations. Peter Burling stated that rail is a choice that the legislature will have to make regarding transportation. Is there a way we can get information about funding roadways and explain the choices? Investment in rail line is a choice. There are the costs for different choices. What are all the alternatives?
 - vi. Representative Bouchard asked "Where are the funding sources?" We need to identify self sufficiency. Peter Burling asked if we could be briefed on the various transportation choices both capital and operating. DOT usually provides this briefing to the house transportation committee. The NHRTA would like to be invited to the briefing or have one at one of our meetings.
- VI. Non-public session - none
- VII. Adjourn – 11:10 am – Kathy Hersh made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by David Preece.

Next Meeting will be held on Friday, November 19, 2010.